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ABSTRACT

The Committee on Tolerance and Understanding reviewed the current state of Native education in Alberta in the context of six principles: respect for diversity, parental involvement, rights of the child, mission of education, role of public education, and shared experiences. The investigation revealed that Alberta Natives are still suffering from intolerance and a lack of dignity and respect, Native parents face extra barriers to effective involvement in education, society is failing to ensure that Native children receive an education of no less than minimum acceptable standards, public education is failing to instill self-esteem in Native students, and increasing involvement in their own education may result in a growing isolationism of Native peoples. The Committee recommended preparation/adoption/implementation of a Native education policy which includes specific proposals on curriculum, teachers, parental and community involvement, and program development. The objectives of this policy should: enable Native children to reach their full potential and achieve parity within the public education system; ensure Native culture/history is adequately/accurately reflected in curricula; preserve Native languages/cultures; encourage Native participation in the education system; develop programs consistent with aspirations of Native communities and student needs; and support local initiatives in providing alternative programs to counteract high dropout rates. (NEC)

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COMMITTEE ON TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

NATIVE EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

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DISCUSSION PAPER #2

JUNE, 1984.

RC 015662

COMMITTEE ON TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

NATIVE EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

Discussion Paper

June, 1984

This is the second of four Discussion Papers to be distributed by the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding prior to its final report to the Minister of Education in December, 1984. The Committee intends to distribute Discussion Papers in September and October, relating to the topics of Public Education and Curriculum, and Intercultural Education respectively. The first Discussion Paper, "Private Education in Alberta", was released May 4, 1984. The intent of the Discussion Papers is to set before the citizens of the Province of Alberta the views of the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding with respect to the topics. Albertans are invited to respond to the Discussion Papers, in order to assist the Committee in preparation of their final recommendations.

The Committee will be pleased to receive written communication from interested Albertans with respect to the views of the Committee as contained within this discussion paper. Such communications should be addressed to the Committee at the following address:

COMMITTEE ON TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING
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PREAMBLE

The general state of Native education in Alberta is deplorable.

The failure to respond to the special needs of Native students has been a shameful act of intolerance and misunderstanding.

One need only examine the tragic circumstances involving Native youth, which point to unacceptable dropout rates, the dearth of Native students graduating from colleges and universities, suicides, a disproportionate number of Native youth in correctional institutions, age/grade retardation and unacceptable levels of poverty and alcoholism, to conclude that our Native youth are being treated as second-class citizens by our educational system.

That is not to say that the educational system is totally to blame.

There are other reasons; historical, social, economic, and a reluctance on the part of some Natives to fully appreciate the significance of education for their overall advancement.

Nor should one ignore the achievements and new directions which are becoming more and more evident in Native education in the Province of Alberta.

However, there is much to be done to redress the neglect, ill-conceived policies and paternalistic approach that has for too long symbolized the state of Native education in the Province of Alberta.

It is time for action, not for yet another study.

No group in our society has been studied to the extent of our Native population. The shelves in Government offices are stacked with study upon study relating to the problems of the Native people. It is time that the Government took the studies from the shelves and turned them into policies to be acted upon.

In moving to meet the needs of the Native community, we must remember that simplistic terms and solutions are a danger to be avoided. The Native people, Indian, non-status Indian and Metis often have different goals and aspirations. Each group has a unique history, culture and lifestyle. We must recognize their diversity within our educational system.

Many Natives in this Province find themselves in the difficult state of transition, caught between two worlds, a dilemma experienced by many other minority cultures. Some hold tenaciously to their proud heritage, wish to retain their traditions and way of life, and to remain in their Native communities. Others have been thrust into an urban way of life, some have become assimilated, while others are without roots, dignity, self-esteem or direction.

Some of the recommendations in this Discussion Paper may relate to certain segments of our Native population, but not to others, and this is to be expected from such a diverse and heterogeneous group.

From an historical, social, economic and educational perspective, the circumstances that face the Native community in Alberta today are unique and unparalleled in Alberta history. The complexities of responding to the problems of the Native population are difficult, but for too long these complexities, of society's own making, have been used as an excuse for inaction, indifference and neglect.

The fact remains that the Government of Alberta is directly responsible for the education of over 30,000 Native students, and that the government of Alberta has a responsibility to ensure that all students in the Province of Alberta receive an education of no less than minimum standards.

These are responsibilities that are not being met and require immediate attention.

The members of the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding can only hope that their feelings of indignation are reflected in this report, and that Albertans will come to realize, if they do not already, the deplorable state of Native education in this Province, so that the energies and resources required will be supplied as soon as possible to relieve the crippling effect of present practices.

OVERVIEW OF NATIVE EDUCATION IN RELATION TO THE SIX FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMITTEE ON TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Since its inception in July, 1983, the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding has established six fundamental principles which have served and will continue to serve as the Committee's guideposts in arriving at the draft recommendations contained in this Discussion Paper and others leading to the final report.

In reviewing the state of Native education today in Alberta, in the context of the six stated principles, the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding found few strengths and many weaknesses.

At the outset, the Committee wishes to recognize the dedicated professionals and laymen in Government, academic institutions and communities who have committed their expertise and energies to meet the complex challenges of Native education in our Province. It is significant to note that Native leaders are often initiating and directing the research and implementing the programs.

This growing trend is the signal of a new era, in that the Native people in Alberta are working for the right to determine their own goals and aspirations and to decide their own new directions. There are lessons to be learned from the past, but we must acknowledge these as history and face the reality of today.

Principle 1

RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

> "Alberta is an open democratic society. One of the pillars of our strength is our commitment to permit and to encourage, if needed, the development of the diverse cultures, religions and philosophies that we embody into a vibrant, energetic and respectful society. In an open democracy, choices must not be denied by government edict unless they run clearly contrary to the overall public harmony."

Looking back through history, it is difficult to grasp the extent of the arrogance, intolerance and wilful ignorance displayed by some in our settlement culture towards the Native Peoples of this land. Many authorities of the new settlements viewed themselves as agents of a superior culture and religion with a duty to replace the Native Peoples' way of life with their own.

"Civilize" meant assimilation into the settlement culture's ways and beliefs.

Native Peoples were prohibited from practicing their own religions; were denied freedom of movement; their language was suppressed and their children were forced away from their homes and families to be "educated" in boarding schools.

Generations of Native children grew up without the benefits a normal family life, and were denied the support of a culture which could have assisted them in sustaining their pride and dignity.

"I believe that our Indians are a proud people...one hundred years ago your forefathers and mine started to systematically destroy their heritage and rob them of their way of life. We exploit them today as badly as the fur traders and whiskey traders did before the turn of the century. We've taken away their food supply and confined them to reservations and directed them to either live like whites or perish. Our diseases reduced their numbers to near extinction levels and our treaty promises are still interpreted to our best advantage...our intolerance and misunderstanding is damnable."

Len Ross, Superintendent
Taber School Division

It is difficult to imagine that the cultural restrictions, expropriations, overt repressions and one-sided treaties that were imposed upon the Natives of this Province could occur in today's context, simply because the rules of conduct and standards of human rights have advanced.

But the legacy of intolerance continues, pervading our institutions and our thinking by sheer momentum and often by indifference.

The Native population of Alberta still faces formidable barriers to the development and practice of their culture. Their dignity and respect are not yet assured, their rightful place in our diverse and energetic society not yet taken.

Sadly, many of these barriers are found in the field of education:

"Native education is so far in the past that it cannot wait on the future. For most of the native peoples of Alberta there is no today in education. The evidence is uncompromisingly clear: native learners are caught in a network of mutually reinforcing handicaps ranging from material poverty through racism, illness, geographical and social isolation, language and cultural barriers, defacto segregation, and simple hunger."

Worth Report On Educational Planning 1972

Caught in a tragic web of vicious cycles, often without hope or purpose, even survival becomes an open question.

> "Alcohol and drug abuse serve the superficially useful function of dulling the pain, of clouding our vision so that we need not be confronted in every dimension of our lives with the frightening truth that we have forgotten how to survive in this land."
>
> Overview of Four Worlds
> Development Project, October, 1983

The high incidence of Native poverty, alcoholism and conflict with the law are well known, and tell of a people in distress.

Although reliable statistics in education are difficult to obtain, the Committee was repeatedly advised of the disproportionate number of Native children in our correctional institutions and jails, the shockingly high dropout rates of Native students in our schools, and the generally poor quality of life for many Native students. Sadly, the measure of despair of some Native youths is reflected in a suicide rate which is ten to fifteen times higher than the Alberta average.

CONCLUSION:

Our society has failed to encourage the development of the Native culture to a point where they can take part as equals in the larger context of our open democracy.

The Native peoples of Alberta are still suffering from a legacy of intolerance and neglect, which has a major impact upon our society's ability to deliver educational services to Native youth.

Principle 2

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

> "It is the obligation of parents to ensure that the best education is available for their children."

In determining if parents are fulfilling their desires and meeting their obligation to ensure that the best education is available for their children, we must examine the way parental involvement is encouraged.

Is the educational system "user-friendly"?

Some school personnel make assumptions about Native people based on heresay, myths and the behaviour of the "visible minority", which is a small percentage of the Native population.

Examples of these assumptions are:

> "Native children are not interested in sports - as a result they may not be asked to try out for teams."

> "Native parents will not visit schools - as a result they may not be invited to case conferences and decisions may be made about their children without their input...parents may not be notified of sporting events, field trips or other special events, even though their children are participating in them."

> "Native parents are not interested in school - as a result parents may not be notified of sporting events, field trips and other special events, even though their children are participating in them."

Native Counselling Service of Alberta

There are understandable reasons why some Native parents have not been active supporters of schools. They include:

- Lack of role models in the community to show the value of education. In one community, for example, the first school was built 14 years ago. Before that, unless they were placed in residential schools, local Native people received no education at all. This makes it difficult to communicate the value of education to their children or to offer them the encouragement and assistance they need.

- Parents who have had unpleasant, unhappy and frustrating experiences in residential schools may approach their own children's education with a negative attitude. They may feel they cannot demand that their children should suffer the same experiences.

- Parents may have problems which cause stress for their children and a resulting lack of motivation in school. If these problems lead to children being placed in a foster home, stress and insecurity may increase still further.

Native Counselling Services of Alberta

We found out that Native parents are just as committed to their children's education as any other parent. However, it is sometimes not clear to them, based on their own experience, whether the role of schools is positive, negative or indifferent to their child's future. This makes it even more imperative to open up the channels of communication, and to stress local involvement and orientation programs in order to make the system more "user-friendly".

There is frequently a two way communication problem, not only language problems in that many Native parents do not speak English well, but there are also barriers to communications because of cultural differences and priorities.

"Many Native parents do not know what is happening behind the doors of the classroom. They are normally shy and hold back."

Frank Blonke
Northland School Division

On the part of parents there is reticence and suspicion. Parents often feel powerless to influence policy, curriculum or teachers. They often do not understand the system and how it works. On the part of some teachers and principals there is a lack of empathy, understanding, skills and resources to deal with Native concerns even if they are raised. Obviously, some bridges must be built.

> "Still another significant factor in the education of Native children is the need for "bridge building" between the school, the Native family and the Native community. Because of past policies (eg. residential schools, the low calibre of most Department of Indian and Northern Development schools, the lack of tolerance and understanding by various religious groups entrusted to "educate" the Indian, etc.) many Native people do not feel comfortable with the school system even if they accept the need for the skills that schooling can provide in order to live with dignity in contemporary society. Many school jurisdictions and Native families could benefit from a high quality Native Home-School liaison service that would work to build working relationships between the schools, the Native families and the Native community, generally."
>
> Vern Douglas, Sacred Circle
> Edmonton Public School System

CONCLUSION:

Native parents face many barriers in their overall desire to become involved in the education of their children. These barriers must be overcome so that our schools can become "user-friendly", so that parents will be encouraged to become involved in the education of their children, and so that they may ensure that their children receive the best possible education.

Principle 3

RIGHT OF THE CHILD

> "It is the duty of society to provide maximum educational opportunities for its children and it is the right of the child to receive an education of no less than minimum acceptable standards."

Society has not fulfilled its duty to provide maximum educational opportunities for its Native children, much less ensured that Native children receive an education of no less than minimum standards.

> "Native Education has been a monumental failure, grossly unfair, intolerant of Native culture, and very expensive in its subsequent costs to society. To attempt a solution we must abandon the century-old drive for assimilation."
>
> Dr. Evelyn Moore-Eyman,
> Native Student Services, University of Calgary

Historically the classroom was the place where the Indian was to shed his "savageness" and assume "civilized ways". Native children were segregated in residential schools where the children were isolated from their families for most of the year, forbidden to practice their culture and religion or speak their language.

The Native child had extreme difficulty in adapting to formalized classroom instruction and unfamiliar rules of social conformity. Any attempt to assert Native culture or independence was punished, often in a high-handed and degrading fashion.

> "One kid used to run away continually and when he came back, the teacher would shave his head bald. This would be done in front of the whole class, and he would also be given a lashing and nothing but dry bread and water to drink. This boy became what today's society would term as being from the criminal element."
>
> George Calliou
> (Recollections from Joussard Resident School in the sixties)

Today, many of our Native children are not receiving an education of even minimum acceptable standards. This is evidenced in a multitude of ways:

- The jurisdictional complexities of Indian education, involving both the Federal and Provincial Governments, are marked by a notable lack of coordination in planning in the development of services.

- Alberta has no comprehensive policy or direction in the field of Native education, despite decades of research and input from the Native community.

- There are few suitable and effective curriculum and resource materials for Native students.

- The majority of Native students do not have access to English as a second language programs, or bilingual and/or bicultural programs, and as a result often do not have the skills to succeed in mainline educational programs.

- Native children are often required to travel long distances to and from school, which can take up to three to four hours of their school day.

- Native children are often billetted in receiving or boarding homes with families who do not have an understanding of the Native child's culture or language.

- The Federal school facilities available to Indian children are often inadequate and badly maintained.

- Many teachers of Native children do not have the training necessary to deal in a relevant context with Native students.

- Often, the testing procedures in our schools are linguistically and culturally biased against Native children, resulting in unfair evaluations of ability and/or knowledge.

The combined effect of all these negatives results in alarmingly high Native student dropout rates in our school system.

In the Northland school division, there are approximately 2400 students, over 95% of whom are Native. Only 125 students are enrolled in high school. This is a dropout rate of close to 85%.

It is a feat of courage, perseverance and dedication for a Native student, particularly from an isolated community, to complete high school in Alberta.

Reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, however it is clear that Native youth are leaving our schools in unacceptable numbers.

CONCLUSION:

Our society is failing to meet its obligation to ensure that Native children receive an education of no less than minimum acceptable standards. Alberta Education requires clearly defined policies and procedures that will overcome the multitude of failures and provide Native education attuned to the heritage and cultural background of the students.

Principle 4

MISSION OF EDUCATION

> "The basic mission of education, among others, should be to instill in our children:
> - a sense of self-esteem, the significance of which must never be understated
> - the ability to develop critical thinking skills characterized by values based on openness, inquiry, imagination, original ideas, dissent, rational thinking, creativity and independence
> - the appreciation of our democratic traditions, symbolized by an attitude of tolerance, understanding and respect for others, no matter what their origins or values might be
> -an attitude of creative citizenship characterized by a sense of responsibility that must flow back from each citizen to the society in which he lives."

Of these missions we see the development of self-esteem as being basic to all the others, for without self esteem the best efforts to instill critical thinking skills, an appreciation of democratic traditions and an attitude of creative citizenship will be fruitless.

Self-esteem is based in large part on how one is received in the community. Unless one receives tolerance, understanding and respect, it is very difficult to feel valued, or to give these things to others.

> "Even if a Native child grows up with a good self image, once he or she enters the school system, it is quickly brought to their attention that they should not have that image, that they are 'second class citizens'. Another comment received was that the kids believe 'we're Native, so we can't keep up'."
>
> Native Counselling Services of Alberta

Lack of self-esteem is a serious problem for Native students. To make matters worse, they face a school environment that often does not meet their needs and a curriculum that stereotypes them as savages or losers at worst.

The 1982 report, "Native People in the Curriculum", published by the Alberta government found that more than 60% of the provincial curriculum was biased, out-dated, or stereotypical of Native people.

> "Stereotyping is pervasive in the curriculum..Indians 'massacre' or 'murder', while Indians were 'killed' by whites."
>
> "Native People in the Curriculum" (1982)
> by A. Decore, R. Carney and C. Urion

While the Department of Education has been attempting to correct these problems and is conducting a full audit of the curriculum in cooperation with this Committee, there are also the problems of omission. The curriculum has little to say about the history, philosophy, achievements, and challenges of the Native peoples. These culturally relevant perspectives are essential because these are the realities that make up the Native students' past, present and future. By omitting these perspectives, self-esteem is undermined just as surely by having to attend exclusively to other peoples' history, experience and priorities, as it is by derogatory stereotyping.

It is significant that virtually every successful example of Native education we have seen places first priority on a sense of self-esteem and a positive identity.

> "If my children are proud, if my children have identity, if my children know who they are and if they are proud to be who they are, they'll be able to encounter anything in life. I think this is what education means."
>
> Native Mother

CONCLUSION:

Public education is failing Native students in its most basic mission, the instilling of self-esteem. To fulfill its mission, public education must develop programs that are culturally relevant to Native students, while eliminating the stereotyping and insensitivity.

Principle 5

ROLE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

> "The public education system (which in this report is deemed to include the separate school system) is the prime vehicle by which Alberta society meets its duty to its children in its endeavour to achieve its basic goals of education."

The history of the public education system, federally and provincially, shows clearly its failure to meet its duty to Native children.

> "Such schooling is assimilation-oriented. It de-emphasizes the use of our indigenous language and it causes varying levels of alienation between children and parents."
>
> Indian Association of Alberta

It is vital that the public education system meet its responsibilities by becoming more responsive to the educational needs of the Native students. Native groups are taking action by turning their backs on the public schools and establishing their own schools.

> "We went to your schools. You taught us we were dumb! You taught us we were dirty. You told us we were drunken Indians. We believed you, and we became what you expected us to be. We have tried to adapt for a hundred years to a culture you have known for thousands. You expected too much, too fast. You did not respect our religion, but expected us to accept yours without question! Now we have our own school we teach our children about our great spirit, about our culture and we teach them to be proud."
>
> Chief Al Lameman
> Beaver Lake Band

The public education system must recognize what Native leaders have clearly seen, that educational programs must be adapted to the needs of the Native student. This is a challenge that the public education system must face in concert with the Native people.

The public education system must prove to be more adaptable, and must take the initiative in forming partnerships with the Native community to develop programs that will work, and will provide the best possible education for Native children.

CONCLUSION:

To remain the prime vehicle by which Alberta meets its duty to its children, the public education system must be more adaptable in developing programs that meet the needs of Native students.

Principle 6
SHARED EXPERIENCES

> "In order to enhance tolerance and understanding and respect for each individual within the diverse mosaic that is so characteristic of Alberta, we must wherever possible encourage shared experiences in our schools among children of different cultures, races, religions, philosophies and ethnic backgrounds."

The Committee believes that no society can function if any significant number of its people withdraw into isolation. We must encourage contact, openness, and shared experiences that are so essential to our democracy.

Openness and shared experience will only be non-threatening when people participate as equals, when there are no hidden purposes, and differences of viewpoint are treated fairly and with consideration. This is the essence of tolerance and understanding. In the field of Native education there has been no such give and take.

> "We have always been doing things for or to the Native people, but never with the Native people. We come at them with our own set of values, instead of trying to learn their values."
>
> Grant Matkin, former Superintendent of Schools, Cardston

An environment where genuinely shared experiences are possible is one where people are secure in the knowledge that their identity and culture are understood and respected.

If any group in our society feels rejected, it is understandable that they would choose to withdraw from the majority culture. The challenge is one of bringing people together while respecting their identity and culture.

The schools are a meeting place where young people from different cultures are brought together and learn to live together.

With the trend to increasing Native involvement in their own education, a trend that the Committee endorses, there must be better communication between Native and non-Native communities and local School Board jurisdictions.

Too often, we have experienced committed and dedicated people wishing for the same things but not being able to get together. We have seen Native communities and local school jurisdictions close together in terms of distance, but worlds away in terms of communication.

There are many bridges to be built.

We must strive to achieve the delicate balance of encouraging Native involvement in their own education while taking initiatives to encourage Native children to become involved in learning, playing and working with the non-Native population, and vice-versa, so that a growth in mutual understanding will occur.

CONCLUSION:

There is a danger that the increasing involvement by Natives in their own education may result in a growing isolationism of Native peoples. We must encourage programs that will enhance positive shared experiences with the Native people, in an environment of fairness and consideration that make such experiences possible. Both sides must take initiatives to reach out to the other, so that a new level of mutual appreciation and understanding will be accomplished.

Achievements and New Directions

The general state of Native education in Alberta is deplorable. There are, however, pockets of achievement where dedicated individuals, organizations and communities are making things work. These positive examples are encouraging. They all reflect the same basic principles that we have identified as being fundamental to education for tolerance, understanding, dignity and respect.

We cannot outline all of the positive examples we have seen, but it is essential to illustrate how principles derived from common sense and basic human decency lead to effective education. We have already outlined the tragic consequences of ignoring these principles.

A fundamental principle of education is the obligation of parents to ensure that the best education is available for their children. To observe this principle, parents must be involved in the educational process. They must have a sense of what the school is doing and why, and must be able to participate in shaping the educational priorities and methods for their children.

Community Involvement

The Northland School Division in the northern part of the province has an enrolment comprised of about 96% status Indian and Metis students. In 1980 the Northland School Division Investigation Committee said that before education in this district could be improved:

> "Local people must have input and the curriculum and school must become more relevant to the needs of young people."
>
> Northlands School Division Investigation (1980)

The Northland School Division Investigation Committee went on to say that input was not simply a matter of stating preferences or making demands. Useful input requires engagement and commitment. Moreover, they acknowledged that "there needed to be more active School Board encouragement and facilitation of teacher/community contact, as opposed to merely recognizing that it is a good thing."

In 1983, Bill 58 under the Northland School Division Act was passed. This bill provided for the election of a Board of School Trustees. For the first time, Indians living on reserves have the right to vote and be elected in a School Board election. The Act also provides for local school board advisory committees to be elected by all eligible residents of each community with an operating school.

There are many positive indications that this local representation is having the desired effect: Parents are more involved, Native culture and language programs are being introduced, local resource people are being used by the schools, and attendance has been gradually increasing.

Finding ways of actually achieving parent and community involvement in every type of school serving Native students is part of a "wave" of development that has been slowly building across Canada over the past decade. One way to achieve such involvement is for Indian Bands to administer their own schools.

Band Controlled Schools

Today, 222 Indian Bands across Canada, 11 out of a total of 42 of them in Alberta, administer all or part of the education services on their reserves. Band controlled schools receive more support from parents and also encourage more involvement of the entire community.

"They look at the school as part of the community, rather than an institution they are shoved in. That's the major difference and why they tend to be much more supportive of the school."

Hugh Reid, Regional Director,
Department of Indian Affairs
and Northern Development,
Alberta Region

Band controlled schools illustrate the practical effect of local control over education. Being more sensitive to the realities of their lives and communities, they develop their schools to fit the particular needs of their own children. Band controlled schools make a greater effort to employ teachers and counsellors who are knowledgeable in Native language and culture. Besides a more culturally relevant school program, Band controlled schools are more likely to be involved with and use other resources in the community. Their schools are part of the community rather than something imposed from outside, and are valued as such.

The Alexander Band outside Morinville provides a good example of a Band operated Reserve school in their Kipotakaw (To Call an Eagle) Program. Faced with a situation where none of their children had graduated from high school within the past decade, with spiritual, emotional and economic depression becoming the norm, parents decided the time had come to act. After four years of preliminary work the Kipotakaw Program became a reality in 1982. The program combines traditional Cree values with a new emphasis in learning and allowing children to move at their own pace.

Now, Native parents in the Alexander Band have a real say in their affairs. Parental involvement is high. Attendance has jumped from 50% to 95%. The school is crowded with parents on visitation days compared to the small numbers who attended a few years ago. The school,

"is less of an organized structure and more of an extended family process."

Dora Coutoreille
Kipotakaw Program

When discipline problems threatened the project in its first year, Band Elders were enlisted to help. The Elders keep students in line, and advise the teachers on problems because they know the family history. Corporal punishment has been eliminated.

"The rich heritage passed through the generations of Elders can provide insights into our culture and heritage."

Nekan Ote Awasis Society
(Child of the Future)

Blue Quills near St. Paul is a federally funded Native-controlled education centre serving seven bands in the Saddle Lake/Athabasca district. It is one of the first Native schools in Canada to offer university courses. In 1979, the Morningstar teacher education program began at Blue Quills. Although this program was small, much was learned about how to prepare students for teaching Native programs, and the Morningstar graduates are highly valued in the communities where they are teaching.

Regrettably, this program is no longer available.

It is essential that teacher education programs for those wishing to teach in the Native community be expanded and encouraged. There is a serious shortage of qualified Native teachers in Alberta, and we have the least-developed teacher preparation programs in Native studies in Western Canada.

Blue Quills currently offers a variety of locally relevant employment training programs for Native youth. Enrollment has tripled in the past five years.

The administrative board of the centre, made up of representatives from all seven bands, recognizes the value of these programs and is now planning to extend the programs to all students in the region, with the support and cooperation of Provincial Education authorities. Such cooperation and development of Native skills is at the very heart of tolerance and understanding in Alberta, and should be actively encouraged wherever possible.

Positive Public School Initiatives

Remarkable for its accomplishment in bridging two worlds is Kitaskinaw School on the Enoch Reserve in the County of Parkland. It is unique in all of Canada. Located on a reserve, it is a public school administered by the Parkland School Division, and has been serving both Native and non-Native children in the area since its inception seven years ago.

> "Those responsible for Kitaskinaw have chosen to be tolerant and understanding. Tolerance has been encouraged by dealing with problems openly and honestly. When people are placed in a position in enunciating their concerns openly, their problems can be dealt with more effectively."
>
> Board of Education of the County of Parkland #21

The inevitable start-up problems have been largely overcome, and methods of encouraging tolerance and understanding have been developed through its open door policy by encouraging parental involvement. Social barriers have broken down.

Kitaskinaw School fosters a cooperative attitude and respect for others through examples of the teachers, assists students to develop a strong sense of self worth, and places enphasis on the individual to reduce labelling. The school promotes multicultural understanding and awareness, and aims to provide equal education for both Native and none-Native students. The school also reaches out to the community.

> "The Enoch Band recreation facilities are available to the school during school hours and have been very instrumental in fostering liaison between the school and the entire community it serves."
>
> Parkland County School Division #31

One of the outgrowths of parent and community involvement in education is increased sensitivity to the particular educational needs of the children, as determined by local circumstances.

The Kitaskinaw school is a laudatory example of positive achievement that results from devotion and dedication by its founders, and the tolerance and understanding of citizens of good will who came together and overcame many obstacles to achieve their ends.

Alternate and Cultural Support Programs within Public Schools

Some school jurisdictions with large Native student populations have been developing new methods and materials that are more appropriate and engaging for Native students than the standard curriculum.

The ICAN Program, developed by the Northlands School Division includes cultural and linguistic support materials designed to provide an introduction to schooling for Native students in grade 1, and enrichment for students and teachers in other grades as well.

The Ben Calf Robe Program was developed by the Nechi Institute, originally to stem the high dropout rate from regular urban schools, and is being run as an alternative program by the Edmonton Separate School Board. The program follows the late Ben Calf Robe's philosophy that Native people must get an education to co-exist with others and that education should include Native history and culture in order to provide students with a firm sense of identity so that they can be part of both the Native and larger societies. It stresses the importance of positive role models through use of Native teachers and aides.

The Plains Indian Cultural Survival School (PICCS) is run as an alternative school program under the Calgary Board of Education. PICCS is specifically designed to provide an engaging and effective learning environment for Native students by increasing self esteem and a stronger Indian identity. The school focuses on Indian culture, language, history and develops decision-making and life skills along with the core academic program.

The Sacred Circle Project of the Edmonton Public School Board is a program designed to sensitize teachers to the needs of Native children and illustrate some of their culture, history and philosophy.

Project 99 in Lethbridge has an outreach counselling service, providing a communications bridge between home and school for Native families with children in provincial schools.

CONCLUSION:

Workable solutions to many of the special problems of Native education have been demonstrated.

From the Northland School Division we learn that it is possible to overcome many of the barriers to local representation and involvement in school affairs.

From the Alexander Band we learn how local control of a school can increase community involvement, adapt the programs to the cultural and linguistic context, and dramatically increase student participation.

From Blue Quills we learn that secondary and post-secondary programs can be successfully adapted to Native needs and aspirations. We also learn of the need for more Native teachers and the need for effective teacher training programs to be run in such smaller centers.

From the Kitaskinaw School we learn of the many good things that happen, both academically and socially, when public school authorities and Band education authorities cooperate to build bridges of understanding through shared learning and experience for their children.

From all of the alternate and cultural support programs within the public school we learn that public education can be flexible and meet the unique learning needs of Native students.

All of these examples are a reminder of the importance of acting on sound principles. Children learn when parents and teachers know where they are headed and why, when the policies and principles are solidly based in fairness and consideration for all, and the programs are constructed and conducted with care.

Responsibilities

One of the major barriers to improving Native education is its jurisdictional complexity.

> "An Indian education system must be conceived of as a synthesis of several systems since it utilizes Federal, Band-operated, Provincial and private services. The natural result is extreme fragmentation of Indian education. No effective national or regional structures have been developed to establish the character of Indian education as distinctive, complex, yet forming a recognizable whole within Canadian education."
>
> Indian Education Paper, Phase 1 (1982)
> Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

The 1983-84 operating figures from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development show the following distribution of status Indian students being covered by Federal funding in Alberta:

There are a total of:

11,040 eligible status Indian students;
3,499 attending Federal schools on Reserves;
1,078 attending Band schools;
6,463 attending public provincial schools.

Nearly 60% of status Indian students living on their Reserves are educated in provincial schools through local agreements with the Federal Government.

Federal Government responsibility is restricted to status Indians living on Reserves or Crown lands. Registered Indians living off the Reserves, non-status Indians and Metis are not covered by this legislation and are served in the regular way by provincial jurisdictions.

Reliable figures for students of Metis, non-status Indian and status Indian families living off the Reserve are not available, but would be in the range of 20,000 - 30,000. All of these students would be served by public schools.

These figures show that the public schools of Alberta are the ones most involved in the education of Native students.

Federal Goverment

The Federal Government assumed responsibility for the education of status Indian children under Section 91 of the British North America Act. Up until the 1950's, Federal Government policy was to provide education for Indians mainly through delegation of that responsibility to various Christian religious organizations. During the 1950's, policy changed in the direction of integrating Indian students in provincial schools by means of tuition agreements. In 1973, a new policy was announced, devolving control of Indian education to the Indians themselves. This meant encouraging the development of local authority in the form of Band-operated schools. The Band educational authority would have roughly the same relationship with the Federal Government as local school districts have to the Provincial Government. This policy has been widely accepted, but implementation has been very slow.

Although the Province is the principal provider of Native education, the fragmentation of respnsibility often creates administrative barriers to good human relations and blocks initiatives for improving educational services.

> "The very laws relating to the education of Native students have at times provided barriers to tolerance and understanding."
>
> The Board of Education for the County of Parkland #31

The jurisdictional divisions create inevitable distinctions between people that sometimes show up as debates over which authority pays for what service. If not handled with sensitivity these distinctions can lead to humiliation of individuals

and unnecessary delays in providing services.

> "When a Native student needs glasses, provincial counsellors argue with those from Indian Affairs as to who must pay the costs. In the meantime, the student goes without the glasses because he cannot afford them."
>
> Garth Renyk, Principal
> St. Mary's School, Lethbridge

A lack of coordinated long-range planning between the Federal and Provincial Governments has created serious difficulties for the provision of educational services.

Prior to the adoption of the local control policy, the Federal Government's push for integration of Indian students in provincial schools demanded heavy capital investment in provincial schools. This locked the Federal Government into financial commitments that are still influencing priorities.

> "Because of the contractual nature of the joint school agreements, the Federal Government gives first funding priority to this program, to the detriment of the federal and band school construction programs. This led to the comparative neglect of federal and band requirements with the result that today many buildings are run down and there is a large backlog of school constructions requirements."
>
> Indian Education Paper, Phase I (1982)
> Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

It is significant that while the proportion of Indian children enrolled in elementary school has virtually matched national participation levels, the proportion of children enrolled in secondary school has actually been declining. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this decline, but one that is obvious is that the total number of eligible Indian youth has increased substantially and secondary schools, unlike elementary schools, are mostly far away from home. In communities where

bands have assumed control of secondary education or where provincial schools are close by the Reserve, retention rates are higher.

Some Native parents would rather their children attend provincial schools than federal schools because they have access to better facilities and services. In its 1982 study of Indian education the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development clearly identified the problem:

> "Formal and informal evaluations of the federally-operated and band-operated school systems indicate that they are generally less supportive of student learning than provincial school systems. Lower standards are indicated in areas of both programs and facilities. Additionally federal and band school systems do not have the support of modern management processes and frameworks for the design, delivery, administration and evaluation of educational services which are the norm in provincial systems."
>
> Indian Education Paper, Phase 1 (1982)
> Dept. of Indian Affairs
> and Northern Development

The reason for these deficiencies is starkly clear and frankly stated in the Federal Government's own report:

> "In the mid-1970's there were two headquarter education units, one concerned with development, the other with operations. The seventy-six person year complement also included a small training research unit in Saskatchewan. The present headquarters person-year allotment is nineteen, with six positions vacant."
>
> - Indian Education Paper, Phase 1 (1982)
> Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

We can only conclude that the Federal Government finds itself with a responsibility for which it has neither the capacity nor the will to discharge.

Although the Federal Government does not have the particular capabilities to deliver educational services on a par with provincial standards, it is likely to remain in the field as a major partner in Indian education. Indian associations, struggling to protect their special status, do not wish to lose their direct Federal link.

CONCLUSION:

Federal Native education programs do not meet the needs of the majority of Indian students. In keeping with our principle of parental involvement, we endorse the Federal policy of turning over control of education to Band education authorities. We also recognize the pressing need for cooperative long-range educational policy development involving Native groups and the Provincial and Federal Governments.

Provincial Jurisdiction

If the Federal Government has neither the capacity nor the will to discharge its responsibilities in Native education, the Provincial Government and its local boards have been equally remiss.

A 1984 report, "Recent Developments in Native Education" prepared by the Canadian Education Association contains results of a national survey on provincial programs and initiatives in Native education. The summary for Alberta included the following:

> "Alberta has been closely examining native education during the past decade....At present, policy in Alberta is in a state of flux. Some dimensions of a new policy are emerging but no full blown policy has yet been articulated."
>
> Recent Developments in
> Native Education, a CEA report

We cannot claim to have been unaware of the problems. In 1972, the Worth Commission Report on Educational Planning Alberta stated:

"For the sake of Alberta's Native peoples, and as a measure of the dignity of our province, it is time to stop the learned rhetoric and start the learning action in early, basic, higher and further education...The evidence is clear that native peoples not only need but want better schooling. They must have it. They must have it immediately. They must have better schooling on their terms with a major voice in the development, and strengthening of their own cultural base ... Interracial tolerance, understanding and mutual respect cannot come about unless we help learners from the very beginning to feel secure within themselves and toward their rightful place in society."

"A Choice of Futures"
Worth Report on Educational Planning,
1972

Sadly, the Government of Alberta has not adequately responded to the challenge for action contained in the recommendations of the Worth Commission.

In comparison with the other western provinces, Alberta clearly has the least to show in the areas of Native education policy, curriculum resources, and teacher training programs.

Since provincial public schools provide most of the education for Native students, the province must be prepared to take the initiative in developing educational programs that meet the needs of Native students. It is important to remind ourselves that the jurisdictional complexities are not an excuse. The majority of Native students are educated entirely under provincial jurisdictions.

Although in Alberta educational services are highly developed, there is a troubling history of institutional indifference to the unique learning needs of Native students.

"From the onset of an aboriginal child's schooling, he encounters cultural and linguistic barriers ... Such differences in background in the early years creates difficulties for aboriginal children to adapt socially when encountering formalized instruction at school. Many of the social studies and history texts describe history, development and progress in Euro-Canadian terms ... and generally ignores the aboriginal contribution to Canada's growth. The aboriginal child is taught to feel ashamed and inferior. This low self-esteem invariably results in greater absenteeism and eventually he drops out of school ... The aboriginal child did not drop out, but was gradually and steadily pushed out."

Elmer Ghostkeeper
Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Assoc.

By not being flexible enough to adapt their instructional approach to meet the needs of Native children, many schools assume that cultural and linguistic differences are best treated in the same manner as learning disabilities. There is also a common prejudgment by school personnel that Native children cannot do well in academic programs so they are frequently placed in vocational and service programs without any choice.

Provincial schools also use tests and assessment instruments that often do not take into account the cultural, linguistic and experiential differences of Native students.

"Native students have traditionally scored low on intelligence tests, not because they were of low intelligence, but because the tests assessed skills and concepts they had not needed to develop in their own sociocultural context."

Frank Carnew, Native Student Services
University of Calgary

The lack of initiative to repair what has long been recognized as a serious education problem is inexcusable.

"Courtworkers reported that in some schools in Alberta for example, 'not one Native student has graduated in 10 years'. Underachievement and unhappiness in school are frequently linked. Native Counselling Service of Alberta staff report that many Native children they work with, who are still in school, are not happy and are not doing well. As one courtworker said 'They're just biding their time 'til they're sixteen'."

- Native Counselling Service of Alberta

The reasons for Native student unhappiness are all too clear. Our school system has not developed educational approaches that meet their needs, thus ignoring the principle that school boards must provide maximum educational opportunities for <u>all</u> students resident in their jurisdictions.

We have among us the understanding and skill to match the challenge. The only tragedy greater than the one experienced by the Native peoples would be our continued inactivity and indifference.

<u>CONCLUSION:</u>

It is <u>essential</u> for the Provincial Government to act now to develop and implement an effective policy for Native education.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

In consideration of the following conclusions:

1. The Native people of Alberta are still suffering from a legacy of intolerance and a lack of dignity and respect.

2. There are extra barriers to effective involvement in education for many Native parents.

3. Our society is failing to meet its obligation to ensure that Native children receive an education of no less than minimum acceptable standards.

4. Public education is failing Native students in its most basic mission, the instilling of self esteem.

5. To remain the prime vehicle by which Alberta meets its duty to its children, the public education system must be more forthcoming and adaptable in developing programs that meet the needs of Native students.

6. There is a danger that the increasing involvement by Natives in their own education may result in a growing isolationism of our Native peoples.

the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding recommends:

I THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA IMMEDIATELY PREPARE, ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT A NATIVE EDUCATION POLICY, THE OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIVE EDUCATION POLICY BEING:

- To enable Native children to reach their full potential and achieve parity within the public education system;

- To ensure the Native culture, history and contemporary life is adequately and accurately reflected in the overall curriculum of the public schools;

- To recognize tribal origin and the need to preserve Native languages and cultures;

- To encourage the participation of Native people in the public education system;

- To develop programs which are consistent with the aspirations of the Native community and meet the needs of students;

- To support local initiatives in providing alternate programs to counteract the high dropout rate;

- To encourage communications, cooperation and consultation among all federal, provincial and local authorities to ensure a coordinated effort to meet the needs of the Native community.

II THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INCORPORATE THE FOLLOWING SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND PROCEDURES OF THE NATIVE EDUCATION POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA:

CURRICULUM

a) The development, coordination and incorporation of a comprehensive Native Studies Program into the existing Alberta Curriculum at all grade levels;

b) The commissioning by the Government of Alberta of a Native Learning Resources Series, as a supplement to the Heritage Fund Learning Resources Series. To be developed in coordination with the Native community and consist of texts, audiovisual material, literature and learning aids;

TEACHERS

c) The establishment by the Alberta Teachers Association of a Native Education Specialist Council responsible for program and professional development in the field of Native Studies, which council shall be distinct from the existing Multicultural Education Councilof the ATA;

d) The certification of a post-secondary institution by the Departments of Advanced Education and Education, in consultation with the Native community, which will offer the following programs through outreach campuses located in Native communities, namely:

- a teacher training program for Native and non-Native students who wish to major in Native Studies (equivalent to the now defunct Morningstar program)
- para-professional training for students who want a career as Native counsellors, home-school liaison workers, Native language and culture specialists or teacher aides.

e) Instruct the Faculties of Education in all post-secondary institutions to offer a Bachelor of Education degree program with a major in Native studies;

f) Instruct the Faculties of Education in all post-secondary institutions to require all education students to enrol in an introductory course in Native Studies in order to earn a Bachelor of Education degree;

g) Cause the Government of Alberta to establish scholarships as part of the existing Heritage Fund scholarship program, for students who wish to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in Native Studies or pursue a para-professional career in Native education;

PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

h) Revise the School Act to provide ways and means for Native and Indian parents to be represented on school boards in an elected or non-elected capacity;

i) Encourage Local School Boards to increase involvement of Native parents through such initiatives such as Parent Advisory Councils, Home School Liaison programs, and specialized counselling services for students and parents;

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

j) Request Native organizations to undertake a leadership role and initiate a public awareness campaign to advise Native parents of their rights and responsibilities in regard to the education of their children and to identify ways and means for parents to become actively involved with their childrens' teachers, the school administrators and the political process in their local communities;

k) Develop Native language programs and support resources that can be utilized where demand warrants by local school jurisdictions to provide language options, bilingual/bicultural programs and heritage language programs and English-as-a-second-language programs for Native students;

l) Encourage and provide support to local school boards in designing and implementing programs for Native students in their jurisdictions, including the adaptation of regular and special education programs as well as creating alternative programs.

m) Ensure that the Department of Education and local school jurisdictions take into consideration the linguistic and cultural differences when testing Native students and that testing measures be developed which accommodate these differences.

III THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA INCORPORATE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIVE EDUCATION POLICY:

a) That the Minister of Education convene a conference on Native Education to introduce the Native Education Policy to Native and educational leaders, build public awareness and signify to the Native community the Government's commitment to achieving the policy objectives.

b) That the Department of Education be charged with the responsibility of carrying out the Native Education Policy and that the Minister of Education encourage all school jurisdictions to uphold the policy objectives in their jurisdictions.

c) That the Department of Education establish a departmental structure to be responsible for the development, coordination and implementation of the Native Education Policy of the Government of Alberta.

d) That the Legislative Assembly of Alberta receive an annual report from the Minister of Education on the status of Native education in the Province.